were out of school in the 6-14 years age group. This figure has dropped to 70 lakhs in March, 2006 as per State Government Reports.

(c) and (d) Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, several interventions, such as, opening of new schools, setting up of Education Guarantee Scheme Centres and Alternative & Innovative Education facilities, provision of incentives; focus on education of girls and weaker sections of society and improvement in quality of education in schools have been undertaken to enhance enrolment of children in the 6-14 years age group.

Literacy for poverty alleviation

7. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that literacy has to be integral to any strategy for poverty alleviation as it is the single hurdle on the path to empowerment of the poor;

(b) if so, the comments of Government thereon;

(c) the aims and objectives set for the coming decade;

(d) whether Government are making sustained efforts to cover every illiterate, gender-wise; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI MD. ALI ASHRAF FATMI): (a) and (b) Literacy is integral to any strategy for poverty alleviation and plays a major role in the empowerment of the poor. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) aims to impart functional literacy to adult illiterates in the 15-35 age group. Functional Literacy, *inter alia,* implies:—

- achieving self-reliance in literacy and numeracy
- becoming aware of the causes of deprivation and moving towards amelioration of oppressive conditions through organization and participation in the process of development
- acquisition of skilis to improve the economic status and general well-being

The NLM recognizes that convergence of literacy programmes with the programmes of other development departments is essential for the socio-economic upliftmentof the beneficiaries.

(c) to (e) At present, the combined efforts of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and National Literacy Mission (NLM) aim at providing basic education to all persons in the 6-14 age-group and 15-35 age-group respectively. The goal of SSA is to universalize elementary education in the country. One of the main oojectives of SSA is to bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary level by 2010. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) provides focused strategies for girls in educationally backward blocks. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas are also provided in 1954 blocks aiming to provide residential facilities mainly for SC/ST/OBCs and girls belonging to minority communities to complete elementary education.

The NLM seeks to impart functional literacy to adult illiterates by providing basic literacy under the Total Literacy Campaigns, followed by Post Literacy Programme for reinforcement of literacy skills to the neo-literates and continuing education programme for providing opportunities for life-long education. So far, 597 districts in the country have been covered by the literacy programmes. Women learners constitute over 60% of the enrolment.

It is envisaged that these efforts will be continued during the next Plan with a greater focus on reducing the gender gap. The Approach Paper to the Eleventh Five Year Plan envisages increase in the literacy rate to 85%, substantial reduction in the drop-out rate of school children and in the gender gap by the end of the Plan period

Making AICTE helpful to applicants

8. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether any steps are proposed to make the AICTE open and helpful to all applicants for various approvals;

(b) whether it is a fact that there is a communication gap generally between the AICTE and applicant institutions;

(c) what steps Government would initiate to make the AICTE